

Lake Needwood emptied for dredging efforts

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By Paige L. Hill

The Montgomery County Parks Department is doing everything to make Lake Needwood a safe recreational space for residents following the discovery that a toxic blue-green algae had spread in the lake during the summer months, according to county Parks Department spokeswoman Kelli Holsendolph.

"We want Lake Needwood to be a more enjoyable place, a place where people want to spend time," Holsendolph said. And that process began when the lake was drained all of its water recently in preparation for an arduous six-month-long dredging process.

"Dredging the lake will help prevent more algal blooms from happening," Holsendolph explained. "This summer we saw a microcystis, or a toxic blue-green algae that can cause minor skin irritations."

Dredging can only be done over dry sediment and so the lake has to be drained weeks in advance. Though dredging was set to begin in early October, several rain storms brought the draining water level back up. Dredging is set to begin in early December. Lake Needwood is about 75 acres in size and was created in the 1960s to provide flood control.

"Since we are working outside, we are, of course, dependant on the weather, but we want to see people enjoying the boat rentals in time for the boating season," Holsendolph said.

"The sediment's accumulated so much that there are actually dry spots in the middle of the water," said project manager Steve Reid, of the Park Development Division.

The dredging is needed to remove nearly 20 year's worth of sediment buildup, according to the project's manager Steve Reid, of the Parks Department.

"Dredging could remove nearly 100,000 cubic yards of sediment from the lake," Reid said.

The dredging will also aid in future flood control efforts by increasing the volume of water that the lake can hold. In late June of 2006, more than 2,000 residents were evacuated from a downstream neighborhood after heavy rains caused the water level to rise, and Lake Needwood Dam leaked water for days.

"Clearly, the dredging covers many areas, but flood-prevention is a big one," Reid said. The dredging was included as part of the parks department's Capital Improvements Program funding for fiscal years 2009-2014 and is estimated to cost \$3.8 million. That funding will cover all improvements made to the lake and precautions that will be needed to protect the wildlife that the lake is home to, especially the local turtles.

"The turtles burrow and hibernate actually in the sediment we will be dredging when the winter comes," Reid said. "We are getting them out now before we start — we've found about 30 turtles and tagged them so far."